



US Army Corps
of Engineers

Construction Bulletin

No. 95-7. Issuing Office: CEMP-CE Issue Date: 2/24/95 Exp. Date: 31 DEC 97

CEMP-C

Subject: Informal Construction Training

Applicability: Guidance

1. In this period of downsizing and reorganization, training dollars are becoming quite scarce. However, the need for training has not diminished. In fact, the Corps of the future must have an even more efficient, highly trained work force. As always, the burden of training must necessarily fall on the able shoulders of the district and the field office. In these austere times the importance of a comprehensive informal construction training program cannot be overemphasized.

2. The quality assurance and contract administration personnel that work out of a Corps field office could well be our most important asset for accomplishing our mission. Their knowledge, skills and professional acumen are crucial to the timely delivery of quality facilities. It is therefore incumbent upon those in their supervisory chain to support development of the qualities that enable them to become even more proficient at their jobs.

3. One of the most accessible means of skills development is informal training. This training can be accomplished several ways: on the job training (OJT); peer training; training by the local supervisory staff; and training by the district staff. Each of these lends itself well to informal training at the field level, and with a minimum investment in time and resources.

a. Most field offices are fortunate enough to have one or more personnel who are skilled in their positions, who deal effectively with the contractor and others with whom they work, and who are very knowledgeable in contract administration. These employees are able to contribute much to OJT. They can be paired with less experienced employees for a one-on-one, hands-on approach. This can be one of the most effective training modes available to the field office.

b. Peer training is another very effective method because it transfers information and knowledge to the work force, and at the

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same time, imparts important training skills to the trainer. Trainers should be selected on a rotating basis and given a list of recommended topics from which to choose. The type of session could be a short talk or simply the introduction of a video tape with a question and answer, or discussion period afterwards. These sessions could be scheduled weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly, and involve as little time as an hour or two. This is a very small amount of time invested for the value gained.

c. The supervisory staff of the field office is another important training asset that is often under-utilized. The Area/Resident Engineer and his/her immediate staff have a constant need to emphasize and enhance the skills and knowledge of their team members, and a training session is the perfect forum in which to do this. Certainly this type of training can be a good managerial tool to give the field office the desired direction.

d. The Chief of Construction and his staff at the district are in an excellent position to contribute to informal training at the field office level. They should assure that each field office develops comprehensive training plans (made up of a combination of the above described methods) and monitor these plans to ascertain accomplishment. In addition, they should take a direct role in the training by conducting some of the training sessions.

4. Finally, an equally important and powerful method for assuring the technical competency of our construction work force is each members personal commitment to self development. Construction professionals need to understand that their job responsibilities are too great and technology change too rapid to rely solely on past experience. Professionals thoroughly research contract plans and specifications along with the applicable specification references. For example, what does the National Fire Protection Code reference stipulate that is pertinent to this particular contract? There needs to be time allotted each day to learn something new to apply to our job responsibility. Supervisors must encourage such professional behavior, and team members must understand that self-development not only helps them do today's job better, it makes their promotion potential in the Corps even greater.


CHARLES R. SCHROER

Chief, Construction Division